

Blaxhall Village Newsletter



Winter 2022

Omicron Ambush



Let's be clear, I'm not mentioning a certain virus in my blurb for this quarter's newsletter, given my history of saying things are looking up only for them to take an enormous downward turn before the ink is even dry (*but hey, things ARE looking up!*).

Christmas has been and gone, with Wiggy & Co. again doing us proud (above) and the Christmas Party managing to just beat the arrival of Omicron, though the Carol Service was sadly hit once again, seeing the attendance reduced to around 40, compared to some 150 in happier times, while many of our festive plans were curtailed or cancelled. On the bright side, the recent storm did limited damage, felling a couple of trees, but thankfully causing no injuries or major destruction and, amazingly, no loss of power.



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Repairs Progress

In the last newsletter we told you about the structural survey being carried out on the tower. The PCC has received the structural engineer's report from which it is clear that, in order to secure and safeguard the fabric of the church, substantial work is required asset out is the following summary.

The tower is a substantial structure of brick, flint and lime mortar. The major issues are in the middle section where significant rebuilding has taken place at the southwest corner using brickwork with a large number of iron ties and straps being introduced. This ironwork is corroding and causing a problem to the walls where it is inducing cracks and this a point of concern. There are cracks, distortion, and bulges in a number of places together signs of delamination of some of the stonework. The buttresses also show signs of cracking, distortion, and some degree of spreading. Further investigation is needed.

Corrosion of the ironwork requires priority attention, as without it, stone and brick decay will continue, with an increasing risk to the integrity of the structure. There is no immediate risk of a collapse.

The Belfry louvres are in poor condition and the timber requires replacement. Surrounding stone and brickwork also requires attention with current damage permitting rainwater ingress. Internally there is corrosion of the ironwork with associated stone/brick damage. The timber floors are poor and need replacement. Whilst the oak bellframe appears to be sound the orientation of the bells and support frame is not structurally sound and when the poor condition of the floors is added the engineer advises that bell ringing is not re-started.

Following discussions with the architect and structural engineer it is clear that further detailed and "intrusive" investigations are necessary in order to make a full assessment of the damage and to develop a detailed specification of works against which contractors will be asked to quote. The cost of this process will be in the range of £12,000 - £15,000. This seems costly but the work requires the expertise of several professionals with specialist equipment for working at height around the tower. This will ensure we have thorough knowledge before seeking tenders. Although the PCC is holding a modest balance in the building fund it is not enough to cover this work so a new round of fundraising will be needed before this investigation can begin

We have been advised that the likely cost of all the work required will be in the region of £200,000 although the above inspections will provide greater clarity. This is an eye watering sum, but it is important that we leave a legacy that will last for many generations. Cutting corners now will lead to further problems in the future. The PCC will once again be approaching specialist grant funders and seeking other donations to support the project.

It's going to be a LONG process.....sadly, in the meantime, no bell ringing!



Parish Council

Mill Common

An approach has been made by Mr Pugh, the owner of mill common, to find if there is a way forward to the long running saga of allotments and common land. The last time this was brought up the proposal was for up to 11 houses on School Hill. The offer was that if the Parish Council supported the application the Parish Council would be gifted the freehold of the allotments and common land associated with Mill Common. This proposal was deemed unacceptable. There has since been an application for a house in the middle of Mill Common, which was subsequently withdrawn.

Mr Pugh asked to meet me informally as chairman of the council to see how any proposal could be put forward. I agreed to meet and act solely as a conduit to put any proposal to the Parish Council at it's next meeting. Mr Pugh said he hoped a proposal of just 4 houses around School Hill and 1 house on the allotment plot 24 on Mill Common might be acceptable. I informed him that one of Blaxhall's proposals in East Suffolk Council's local plan is that only developments of 1 or 2 houses in a block should be allowed. Mr Pugh revised his proposal to 2 houses on School Hill and 1 on allotment plot 24. I advised him this might be more acceptable and that I would put this on the next meeting agenda to be discussed by the Parish Council. He also stated that the Parish Council would have their say on design and type of houses and would put legal enforcement in place so the homes would be sold as prime residences and not holiday homes.

The matter was discussed at the January council meeting. In general the proposals were considered, on balance, to be of benefit and would safeguard the village in the long term, but many things need to be discussed more widely. First of all we need a firm proposal in writing from Mr Pugh, we also need to get planning advice from East Suffolk District Council as well as investigating legal matters.

If the proposal was acted on it would give the village control over what is essentially the major part of Blaxhall. We could decide exactly how the village would look and feel and tend the common land as we feel fit.

This along with the excellent news that B.C.O.S.T. now have ownership of Stone Common means we would have control of the whole village, for the village.

This is such an important proposal for the village that it should not be for the PC alone to decide. If and when there are concrete proposals on the table we will have a village meeting to fully discuss it.

Graham

(Turn to page 6 for village hall and playing field news)

The Ship



As we race towards Spring and the end of March, with its long awaited clock change. We are entering a very positive mood, in the life of The Ship.

From consideration of complete closure for January and February, to having the pub fully supported by Villagers and our travelling locals. A huge thank you to you all for oceans of support through bad weather and Covid.

At 15.10 hrs on the 30th January Mags and I completed 2 years of our sentence, sorry tenure. At this rate we may be heading for a long service award or possible parole

We are running behind with publicising our March and April events page, but it will be issued shortly.

All of our event evenings have been very well supported.

In terms of media coverage, 2 articles recently in The East Anglian, and a mention in the



Independent cultural section and The Saturday Daily Telegraph Magazine.

Our regular Monday afternoon Sing Say or Play sessions are going from strength to strength. All welcome starts at 14.00hrs.

The 3rd Wednesday of the month sees The Ship hold a Traditional Folk Evening, commencing at 20.00hrs.

Men Behaving Badly?

Rummaging through a folder of old photos this week I came across a couple labelled "Men's Club" and obviously showing an event at the village hall. Neither are dated, but they were evidently taken in the late 40s or early 50s judging by the age of some familiar faces, together with decor and fashions. The image of 60 men lined up with beer bottles and plates, apparently being filled/refilled by the village females may not be entirely politically correct by modern standards, but I imagine at the time it was very much accepted and enjoyed by most. Perhaps some of our older readers can remember more of what went on at the Men's Club and send us



some more details or information?

Please email shane@blaxhall.com if you're able to elaborate. Also interesting to note, is that almost all references to the village hall prior to the 1990s saw it called the 'parish room'; indeed, I remember a couple of instances where older village residents severely chastised people for using the term 'village hall'!



Train Trouble

Moving on, I was speaking to a young neighbour recently who has no recollection of manned railway crossings, with their familiar keeper's cottages and long white gates with red circles in the middle, which inspired me to unearth these two snaps. The photo on the right shows the former gate-keeper's cottage at Beversham, taken c1900; the blurry-faced lady in black is probably Ellen Haselup, who lived there with her husband, James, for some 30 years around the turn of the century.



It was a profession not without risk, and more than once the person responsible was too slow off the mark closing the gates to traffic, resulting in



the oncoming train smashing through them. Unsurprisingly, the Blaxhall crossings witnessed a number of deaths during their 130 years of manned operation, including Abraham Pratt in 1889 and Mary Poacher in 1971. The last gatekeepers at Beversham were, I believe, Frederick and Lilian Theirauf, who retired in the early 1980s, when the crossing was automated and the cottage demolished, (but I stand to be corrected if anyone can remember the Theiraufs being replaced before closure). The gates maybe long gone at the Beversham and Blaxhall Hall crossings, but those who fancy a literal trip down memory lane can still find the original gates on the now-disused road crossing at Blackstock (seen left in the 1930s/40s).

Village Hall and Playing Field

The hall and playing field are a great asset to Blaxhall and both are regularly used and enjoyed.

This year's Christmas party was a great success, it seems that everyone was ready for a good knees up and they weren't disappointed. Although the aim was for enjoyment and not about making money, we made a record profit of £800. This is enough to buy the materials for a Boules pitch! Hopefully, with enough volunteers, we can build one in the spring.

We continue to search for grant funding to refurbish and enhance the dating equipment on the field and if this is not forthcoming plans are still afoot to install the Boules pitch

Unfortunately we have had some not so welcome visitors, climbing on the hall roof and breaking roof tiles, we have had to replace 100 tiles. There also seem to be people in the area that think the Village Hall bins are for public use, filling them with their personal rubbish so there is often no space left for hall users. Hopefully the word will get to the culprits and the bad behaviour will stop.

Book Swap

The book and puzzle swap in the bus stop continues to be a great success even after lockdown has finished. In fact, with limited space, we are accumulating so many books that the overspill regularly gets taken to the charity shops. There certainly is a wide choice to suit everyone.

A recent new addition is a seed swap box, just put in any spare seeds, with a clear label on them and take any seeds you need.

The bus shelter suffered some minor damage in the recent storm, but nothing that will require a team of roofers with scaffolding!



The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

We plan to have events on the playing field to mark this occasion on Saturday 4th June and need more ideas from you all for the rest of the weekend.

The next meeting of the Village Hall and Playing field committee is at 7.30 Tuesday 8th March and we would welcome you to come along with your ideas.

Heavyweight Harvesting

Mike Cowling sent us this great pic of carrot harvesting last week. The £½ million worth of high-tech equipment, working through the night, bares little resemblance to the way the same task would have been accomplished just 70 or 80 years ago, within living memory.



Update from the Blaxhall Commons and Open Spaces Trust

Organised by Joy Shaw (Blaxhall Tree Warden), a team of eager BCOST volunteers worked off any Christmas and New Year over-indulgence with hedge-planting working parties on 27 December 2021 and 3 January 2022. Well over 100 yards of hawthorn, hazel and other hedging plants were planted around the Trust's land at Stone Common (right), and in hedging gaps on neighbouring farmland.



We are delighted to report that, working with the Parish Council, BCOST has successfully obtained funding for further planting, under the Tree Council's Branching Out fund. The fund supports schools, community groups and Tree Warden Networks to plant trees, hedges and orchards, with the proviso that projects must involve young people (up to the age of 21).

Grateful thanks are due to Suzy Pearce, Rosy Thornton and Joy Shaw for preparing the application and sourcing the trees. As a result of their efforts, twelve fruit trees will be planted on sites at Blaxhall Playing Field and Stone Common on Saturday 5 March. If you're aged 21 or under, or if you have children or grand-children who are keen to

help, please join the planting party, which starts on the playing field at 1 pm.



Departing Parson

Reverend Rachel has announced that she has been appointed to a new post and will be moving to the Diocese of Chichester in the near future.

Rev Rachel says: *It has been good to have been here for over four and a half years. Much has happened during that time and I have made many friends who will be missed. Times like this feel like quite an upheaval as plans have to be made, decisions taken and a new incumbent found. God's love for each of us is unfailing and God desires the best for each individual and a community where all may flourish. I am certain from what I know of you that things will settle down and you will all be absolutely fine as you begin a new journey in the life of the benefice.* **Rev Rachel**

Blaxhall Festival

It's early days, in many ways, but fingers crossed the Festival will finally return this year, so watch your letterbox for updates and do please offer to help if you can - it's a genuine case of many hands makes light work!



Queen's Platinum Jubilee - Branching out Fund

Blaxhall has been successful in receiving a grant to plant 12 Fruit Trees on Stone Common and the Playing Field

We now need children and young people to take part in the planting from 1pm on Saturday 5 March 2022 – meeting first at Stone Common, moving to Playing Field

Please register to join in by contacting:
Suzy Pearce 07830 508092

suzypearce@outlook.com

Young children may have adult assistance, so all welcome



Parish Councillors

Graham Bowles	01728 688192 (Chairman)	Karen Baker	01728 688200
Shane Pictor	01728 688205	Ray Herring	01728 746337
Jonathan Cutting	01728 688003	Mark Oakley	01728 687507
Joanne Peters	01394 459400 (Parish Clerk)	Ken Anderson	01728 688316

Suffolk Coastal District Councillor - Ray Herring 07885 249218

ray.herring@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

Suffolk County Councillor - Andrew Reid 07545 423799 andrew.reid@suffolk.gov.uk

Copies of minutes and agendas can be found at <http://blaxhall.onesuffolk.net/parish-council/>

Parish Council meetings are held in the Village Hall at 7.30 and are open to all parishioners, the public and press. The 2022 dates are: **Wednesday 12th January, Wednesday 2nd March, Wednesday 4th May, Wednesday 6th July, Wednesday 7th September** and **Wednesday 2nd November**.

Community Transport – “Connecting Communities” **01728 635938** The service booking line operates 08.45am to 4pm, Mon-Fri

Blaxhall Commons & Open Spaces Charitable Trust – www.blaxhallcommonstrust.org
For contact details of all trustees ring Mark Oakley 01728 687507

The **Mobile Library** comes to Blaxhall, and stops at **The Youth Hostel 9.35 – 10am** calling every 4 weeks on Wednesdays: the upcoming dates are **9 March, 6 April, 4 May, 1 June, 29 June, 27 July, 24 August, 21 September**

Large print, Audio & Childrens' books, also CDs and DVDs are available for a small charge. Contact Pete Wells or Helen Hudson on help@suffolklibraries.co.uk, visit the website <http://suffolkreads.onesuffolk.net/libraries-and-mobiles/> or phone **01473 584563**

To put something in the Village Noticeboard, please ring Graham Bowles 01728 688192
To put something in the Newsletter email to shane@blaxhall.com tel. 01728 688205

Allotment information contact Sophie Martin on 07724 356916,
Blaxhall.Allotments@gmail.com

Deadline for next Newsletter - 15th May